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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to include a segment of phonemic awareness in a multi-level English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classroom as learning progress seemed to be inhibited in part by a lack of understanding of the structure of the English language. A survey was developed and administered to measure student progress to establish a baseline. Students measured consisted of Hispanic migrant workers, Hispanic laborers from local factories, political refugees from Eastern Europe, immigrants, and visitors to America. For three months, the instructor included a segment of phonemic awareness at some point in each class session. The survey was again administered to the students. Results of the second survey were inconsistent, causing the researcher to call for further evaluation of the merits of incorporating phonemic awareness in adult ESL. (The instrument is appended.) (YLB)

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PRODUCT

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I. ABSTRACT

In a multilevel ESL classroom, learning progress seems to be inhibited in part by a lack of understanding of the structure of the English language. After attending a phonemic awareness workshop, it seemed to this researcher that inclusion of a segment of phonemic awareness might be helpful if included in each class period held.

In an attempt to establish a baseline, I developed a survey to measure student progress and gave it to students present at my class. For the next three months I included a segment of phonemic awareness at some point in each class session. The survey was again administered to the students. The results of the second survey were inconsistent. The merit of involving phonemic awareness to adult ESL students, however, needs to be further evaluated.

II. PROBLEM

The class is held two mornings a week from 9:00 A.M. till 11:00 A.M. it is open enrollment and made up of up to twelve students representing 3 or 4 different languages, depending on attendance any given day. These students consist of Hispanic migrant workers, mostly Hispanic laborers employed in two local factories, political refugees from eastern Europe, immigrants and visitors to this country. Students of all backgrounds seem to do better if they understand the structure of the language they are learning. They find it difficult to bridge from receiving to giving language. Phonemic awareness deals with sound structure, the knowledge of which it is hoped can help the transfer to written.

III. PLANNING

The intervention plan was to include an approximately 10 minute session based on phonemic awareness in each class period. Students were asked how many words were in a sentence, then the number of syllables, and finally the number of phonemes or sound units. The phonemes were manipulated - adding, subtracting and substituting beginning, middle or ending sounds.

An improvement either by survey results or by the subjective view of student and teacher was considered a success.

A constraint on the project was the lack of consistent student attendance.

Approval was obtained by the Even Start Area Coordinator, Mrs. Kathy Paul in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Approval was also obtained from Mr. Henry Wardrop, Special Projects Coordinator of LIU # 12.

The literature on phonemic awareness suggests that although the practice is not well studied in teaching adult ESL students, it has promise.

IV. ACTION

The students completed the attached survey. Then, for three months in each class session, exercises were completed by the students. This included counting on fingers sentence words, syllables and phonemes. The sentences were then written on the board, read out loud by the students, then copied. Some words were taken out of each sentence to manipulate sounds creating new words.

The students were then retested by using the same survey.

V. RESULTS

Eleven students initially completed the attached survey. Nine were at the beginning level. Two were high beginning. Five were in the class to complete the second survey given three months later. Of those five students only three showed improvement.

Even though phonemic awareness was reviewed twice a week for three months, written that students enjoyed the exercises.

Although the results were disappointing, the researcher is anxious to reinvestigate this approach. The survey needs to more adequately measure current student phonemic understanding.

VI. REFLECTION

It seems to the researcher that the students showed an emerging understanding of the language structure, not measured on the survey. Consistent attendance would change results and more quickly carry over into the language learning process. In this adult ESL population, however, there are many more concerns in student's lives than English language acquisition even though it seems of paramount importance to the teacher. The students showed an improvement of spelling as

noted in their journal entries and more easily manipulated words and sounds in class.

It is possible that physically manipulating discs standing for the words, syllables and phonemes might reflect in a higher learning curve. A tool which more adequately measures phoneme acquisition needs to be developed.

Although phonemic awareness is thought to be a useful tool for readers with special needs, lack of phonemic awareness is an obstacle for many, particularly ESL learners.

Prior to administering the survey

Teach actions: circle, write and check

Review these words: know, write/written, alphabet, vowel, called sound, word

My name is. _____ The Date is _____

1. I know the English alphabet. (circle yes or no)

2. I can write the English alphabet. (write one letter on each line)

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

3. I know the vowels. (circle the ones you know)

4. Ile other letters are called _____

5. I know the sounds of the letters in the English alphabet.
(put a check () over the ones you know)

6. When I look at written English words I _____

_____

Results:

Date: _____

Alphabet sounds _____

Vowels _____

Consonants _____